



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



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1. IRAQ

- **Kurdistan Alliance denies any differences between Talabani and Barzani.**



BAGHDAD / NINA / Kurdish coalition forces denied any disagreement between the President Jalal Talabani and the president of Kurdistan region Massoud Barzani about the political crisis.

The spokesman for the coalition, Mo'aid al-Tayeb told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "Barzani said earlier, and currently confirms, he stands with the President Talabani in his efforts to resolve the political crisis, in case he attends the national meeting or does not."

Tayeb added: "all the political blocs are waiting to reach solutions for the outstanding problems, but the intention of some parties not to attend the national

meeting indicates a lack of trust among the political parties."

News release indicated that there is an existence of differences between the President of the Republic Jalal Talabani and the resident of Kurdistan region Massoud Barzani about the mechanism to resolve the political crisis.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDJFJF

- **Nujaifi and a parliamentary delegation head to Kirkuk then Sulaymaniyah**

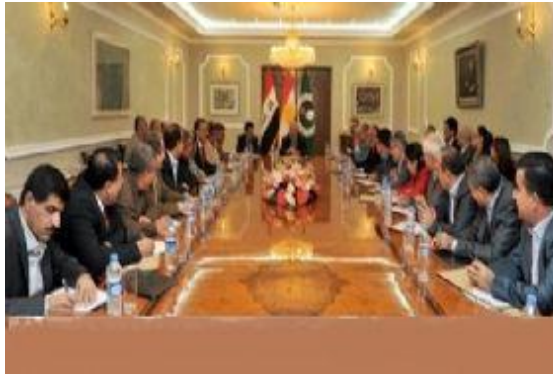
BAGHDAD / NINA / House Speaker Osama Nujaifi and a parliamentary delegation have headed this morning 24, Sep to Kirkuk.

A parliamentary source said that Nujaifi will travel, after his visit to Kirkuk, to Sulaymaniyah to meet with President Jalal Talabani on the occasion of his return from his therapeutic trip

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDJFIL

- **PUK: Situation in Iraq still suffers from ruling crisis**

Baghdad (NINA) – The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Commanding Council asserted that the situation in Iraq still suffers from ruling crisis and harmonious government, regardless of gains, such as democratic freedoms, writing the Constitution and foiling anti democracy conspiracies.



A statement issued on Sunday, Sep. 23, at the end of its meeting, the Council said that most of the problems between the Arab Sunnis and Shiites have not been worked out in democratic way. It is causing terrorism to continue, in addition to lack of basic services, such as electricity, poverty, unemployment, in addition to decline in the level of education to a scary level.

It went on saying that though the problem of oil and gas between the region and Baghdad has been worked out, yet other problems still to be worked out, such as implementing Article 140, security, Peshmerge and the establishment of Dijla Operations Command.

The statement went on saying that the PUK Commanding Council believes that the only mean to solve all outstanding problems can be worked out through responsible dialogue. It pointed out the important for agreeing on a mechanism for drawing a road map toward solving all outstanding problems in a democratic way.

As for the situation in Kurdistan region, the statement went on saying that regardless of administrative, political and constitutional obstacles, the Region has gone a long way toward establishing democracy and its progress is becoming more evidence day after day, through increased investment and expanded diplomatic relations with the rest of the world.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDJFEK

- **Nechirvan Barzani discusses with Korean Consul mutual cooperation**



Baghdad (NINA) – Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, discussed on Sunday, Sep. 23, with the new Korean Consul to the Region, Yong He Won, mutual cooperation.

A statement issued by the Region's government quoted Nechirvan Barzani asserting the region's government readiness to cooperate toward making the new Consul's task in the region successful.

Nechirvan Barzani shed light on the Korean firms' projects in the region and the ones to be carried out in the fields of energy and oil.

For his part, the new Korean Consul expressed pleasure for working in the region and become acquainted with the

developments realized achieved in the region.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDJFEH

- **Jaafary, delegation of INC discuss political updates**

Baghdad (AIN) –The head of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ibraheem al-Jaafary, and delegation from the Iraqi National Congress, headed by Ahmed al-Chalabi, discussed the updates of the political process.

A statement by INA received by AIN cited "Jaafary received the delegation on last Sunday," noting that "Both sides stressed the necessity of consolidating INA's role and strengthening the relations among its parts."

www.ninanews.com/english/News_Detail_s.asp?ar95_VQ=GDJFEH

- **Talabani to visit Erbil next Tuesday**

Erbil (AIN) –The President, Jalal Talabani, will visit Erbil Province on next Tuesday.

A statement by Patriotic Union of Kurdistan quoted its Spokesman, Azad Jundiyanı, as saying "Talabani will head to Erbil to hold meetings with the Kurdish parties."

Earlier, Talabani arrived in Sulaimaniya coming from Germany where he underwent a medical treatment there.

Iraq witnesses political crisis lasted for several months due to the disputes among the political sides related to the partnership and other issues which led some blocs to call for withdrawing confidence from the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, after holding meetings in Najaf and Erbil provinces.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19177:talabani-to-visit-erbil-next-tuesday-&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Zibari, Kobler discuss UNAMI's role in Iraq**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Foreign Minister, Hoshiyar Zibari, discussed with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Martin Kobler, and the role of the United Nations

Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in Iraq.

A statement by the Ministry received by AIN on Sunday cited "Zibari received Kobler and the accompanied delegation, at his residence in New York, where they discussed UNAMI's role in Iraq and the means of relieving Iraq from the UN Charter's Seventh Chapter."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19165:zibari-kobler-discuss-unamis-role-in-iraq&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Talabani to hold meeting with Kurdish Taghyeer bloc**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Head of the Kurdish Taghyeer bloc, Neshirwan Mustafa, will visit the President, Jalal Talabani, in Sulaimaniya province.

The office of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) quoted its official spokesperson, Azad Jendyani, as saying that "The General Coordinator of the Kurdish Taghyeer bloc and his accompanying delegation are scheduled to visit Talabani, on Monday, in order to hold joint political meeting," noting that

"Several members of the political office of the Kurdistan Patriotic Union will participate in the meeting."

The statement added that "The results of the meeting will be announced on public after the end of the meeting."

The Kurdish Taghyeer bloc, which headed by Neshirwan Mustafa, the former leader within the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan which is headed by the President, Jalal Talabani, was created after the withdrawal of several members from the Kurdistan Patriotic Union.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19198:talabani-to-hold-meeting-with-kurdish-taghyeer-bloc&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Call to stop torturing prisoners, Iraqiya MP**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP called today ministries of justice and human rights to intervene to stop torturing the detainees following the repetition of the death of many of them.

Salahal-Din MP Mutashar al-Samarra'l described the death cases as "dangerous".

In a statement, he expressed "sorrow for death events inside Iraqi prisons".

He pointed out that 90% of the detainees are "innocent".

Iraqi parliament is discussing the General Amnesty Law amid difference in opinions among political circles which voting was postponed last week.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28cjtymgjppqnlrpu1ggmtsejg%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150608&l=1

- **Constitution does not permit parliament questioning Barzani, legal expert**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Legal expert stressed today that "the Iraqi constitution does not permit the parliament questioning president of the Kurdish region", pointing that "does not prevent hosting him or any other official through a law to be legislated for this reason".

Head of the Legal Culture Association Tariq Harb said, in a statement today, that

the constitution stipulated the posts to be questioned by the parliament, "but does not prevent hosting others through a special law to be legislated".

Earlier, State of Law MP Hussein al-Asadi disclosed on Thursday last that "a signature campaign shall be made this week to question president Barzani for constitutional violations on the border vents, oil contracts and training Syrian opposition in the Kurdish region.

Relations between the Kurdish region and the central government witnessed chronic crisis for different dossiers, particularly the oil and gas law, Beishmarga forces, government administration, Article 140 of the constitution and the Syrian crisis.

http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28cjtymgjppqnlrpu1ggmtsejg%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150607&l=1

2. IRAN

- **Iran's Basij Force Calls for Boycotting US, European Goods**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Basij force in a statement on Sunday called on the parliament and the government to boycott Western goods and products in

retaliation for the recent insult to Islam's Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in a US movie.

"We urge the respectable parliament and government to stage their resolve in defending the sanctuary of pure Mohammadian Islam and the sanctity of the great prophet of Islam by imposing a full ban on imports from the US and the European regimes which support corruptors," the statement of Basij (volunteer) force said.

"No doubt, these crimes (production of blasphemous movies and cartoons against Islam's prophet) will not go unanswered and the Islamic Ummah will not forget its duty of giving a harsh punishment to those who have committed these crimes," it added.

Earlier this week, a senior Iranian legislator also called on all Muslim states, Arab countries in particular, to boycott Western goods and products in reaction to the sacrilegious movie.

"If authorities of (Islamic) countries want to do a useful action, they should impose sanctions on the US and Israel and avoid

supplying their needs from them," Mohammad Esmayeel Kosari told FNA on Wednesday.

He lauded the harsh reaction showed by the Muslim nations against the blasphemous movie which has been produced by an American-Israeli man, and blamed the politicians of the regional states for their inaction and indifference to continued insults to Islamic values and sanctities.

Last week, Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei blamed the US and the Zionists for the sacrilege of Muslims' Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in the movie, and called on Washington to punish those behind the blasphemous act.

In a statement issued at the time, the Iranian supreme leader said the US and Zionists' hands can be seen behind the move, and said if Washington statesmen claim to be not involved in this sacrilege of Islam and Islamic values, they should punish those who have designed and orchestrated the move.

"The filthy hand of the enemies of Islam once again revealed its deep-rooted malice by insulting the Grand Prophet (Mohammad) (PBUH) and with an insane and deplorable measure showed the fury of the evil Zionists at the daily-increasing radiance of Islam and Holy Qur'an in the present world.

"Behind this evil move lie the antagonistic policies of the Zionists and the US and other heads of the global arrogance, who in their vain delusions want to knock down the Islamic sanctities from their lofty position in the eyes of the young generations in the world of Islam and to extinguish their religious sentiments. Had they not backed the previous links in this evil chain, namely Salman Rushdie, the Danish cartoonist, and the US pastors who burned the Holy Qur'an and had they not made orders for (production of) tens of anti-Islam movies to companies affiliated to the Zionist capitalists, things would not have lead to this great and unforgivable sin today," said the Leader.

"The number one suspects in this crime are Zionism and the US. If the American politicians are honest that they had no role, then they must punish those who

committed this heinous crime and their financial backers, who have wrenched the hearts of Muslim nations, in proportion to this great crime," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"Muslim brothers and sisters must know that this desperate move by the enemies in the wake of the Islamic Awakening is a sign of the grandeur and importance of this uprising and heralds its increasing growth," the Leader added.

The film called "Innocence of Muslims", previously called Desert Warriors and Innocence of Bin Laden, is a 2012 anti-Muslim movie which insults Muslims' Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). The film has been financed by more than 100 Jews and produced by an American-Israeli man in the US.

The anti-Islam film has drawn condemnation from numerous countries including Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Iran, Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Morocco, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, etc.

In Iran, millions of Iranians in Tehran and other cities across the country held nationwide rallies in protest against the recent desecration of Islam.

The Iranian protesters chanted "Death to the US" and "Death to Israel" slogans, expressing disgust at the US and the Zionist regime's anti-Islam policies.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241868>

- **12 Oil Reservoirs Discovered in Iran in One Year**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran announced on Sunday that the country discovered 12 oil reservoirs with in-place reserves of 9 billion barrels during the last Iranian year (March, 2011-March 2012).

"We discovered about 12 oil and gas reservoirs in the last Iranian year (ended March 19, 2012), which added 9bln barrels of crude oil to the country's in-place reserves," Deputy Oil Minister for Planning and Supervision on Hydrocarbon Resources Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr said at a press conference in Tehran on Sunday.



<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241864>

- **Leader's Aide: Iran Should Adopt Aggressive Strategy in Response to Threats**

He also underlined that Iran plans to increase its daily oil output to 5.6 million barrels by the end of the country's fifth five-year development plan (from 2010 to 2015).

Iran ranks fourth in the world in terms of crude production after Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States. The Islamic Republic is also fourth in gas production after the US, Russia, and Canada.

The Islamic Republic has the world's second-largest crude reserves after Saudi Arabia and the second-largest gas reserves after Russia.

Earlier, the British energy company (BP) said in its Statistical Review of World Energy that Iran has oil reserves that would last for the next 88 years and is the second longest-lasting oil source in the world.

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior military aide to the Iranian Supreme Leader cautioned about the attempts made by the enemies to weaken the Islamic Republic through economic pressures and public discontent, and said Iran should adopt an aggressive policy in response to enemy plots.

"We should realize the strategy of the enemy and have our own strategy as well. The enemy's strategy includes provoking public discontent and our revolution's main capital is people's trust in the leader, state and the government," senior military aide to the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi said, addressing a group of Basiji (volunteer force) women in Tehran on Sunday.



"We should step on enemy's throat and treat him aggressively because we are a lively and young nation," Safavi added.

Iran's military commanders had earlier warned that Tehran would adopt new policies if the US and its allies continued hostile stances and threats against the Islamic Republic.

In June, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei stressed strong popular support for the Islamic establishment, but cautioned that hegemonic powers are trying to weaken this support through pressures and sanctions.

"These bullying powers, which falsely call themselves 'the international community', are trying to deprive the Islamic Republic of Iran of popular support," Ayatollah Khamenei said, addressing a group of Iranian judiciary officials here in Tehran at the time.

The Leader pointed to the sanctions and restrictions imposed on Iran by the West, and stated, "The sanctions imposed by the arrogant powers mainly target the Iranian people so that pressures wear off the Iranian people's patience and make them separated from the Islamic Republic."

The Leader, however, expressed the confidence that enemies will fail to achieve their desirable results, "because they (enemies) still have no knowledge of our nation and officials".

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241860>

- **Iran negotiating deals to transit gas to Europe**

TEHRAN, Sept. 23 (MNA) - Iran is currently holding negotiations for deals to transit natural gas to Europe, according to Deputy Oil Minister Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr.

Iran can be the most reliable source of natural gas for Europe in the long term, the deputy oil minister for planning affairs told reporters at a press conference in Tehran on Sunday.

“Iran is currently exporting gas to Turkey. The country has signed gas-swap deals with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Negotiations are also underway to ink gas export deals with Switzerland, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria,” the IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.

On September 9, National Iranian Gas Company Managing Director Javad Owji said Iran and Turkey have agreed to transfer natural gas from Turkmenistan to Europe.

On September 4, Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi and Turkish Development Minister Cevdet Yilmaz held talks in Tehran on increasing exports of Iranian gas to Turkey.

Daily gas production in Iran is about 600 million cubic meters, and this is projected to increase to 1.2 billion cubic meters in the future. According to the National Iranian Gas Company, the country's oil and natural gas reserves account for 10 percent and 16 percent of total world reserves, respectively.

Iran, with 155 billion barrels of recoverable oil reserves, ranks fourth worldwide, after Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Canada.

With 34 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves, Iran has the world's second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1703387>

- **Israel’s bark is worse than its bite: Majlis speaker**

TEHRAN, Sept. 23 (MNA) -- Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the isolated Zionist regime has been left with no option but to shout and threaten Iran.

Commenting on the wave of the Islamic Awakening rolling across the Muslim world, Larijani stated, “The dictators subservient to Western countries have fallen, and more important than this is Israel’s isolation, and now, Israel has no other option but to shout to save itself and say, ‘I am alive.’”

The fact that Israel has been isolated is a “very important” issue, Larijani said,

adding, “It is threatening Iran to stabilize its situation.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1703431>

- **Israeli strike on Iran would trigger World War III: IRGC general**

TEHRAN, Sept. 23 (MNA) – An Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities would ignite World War III, Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps commander has warned.

In an interview with the Arabic language Al-Alam TV network aired on Sunday, Amir Ali Hajizadeh said, “We cannot imagine the Zionist regime starting a war without America's support. Therefore, in case of a war, we will get into a war with both of them and we will certainly get into a conflict with American bases... in that case, unpredictable and unmanageable things would happen and it could turn into a World War III.”

He added, “Whether the Zionist regime attacks with or without U.S. knowledge, then we will definitely attack U.S. bases in Bahrain, Qatar, and Afghanistan.”

Hajizadeh went on to say that Israel “cannot imagine our response - and it will sustain heavy damage and that will be a prelude to its obliteration.”

The top general also said, "Iran will not start any war but it could launch a preemptive attack if it was sure that the enemies are putting the final touches to attack it."

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1703429>

- **Iran discovered listening device near Fordo nuclear site: report**

Last month the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps discovered an electronic monitoring device near the Fordo uranium enrichment facility, the Sunday Times reported Sunday, citing Western intelligence sources.

IRGC forces were checking on communications terminals at Fordo when they discovered a rock, according to the report. When the soldiers attempted to move the rock, it exploded, presumably self-destructing.

Last week, Fereydoun Abbasi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), also said explosives had been used to cut power lines from the city of Qom to the Fordo facility on August 17.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1702897>

- **Ahmadinejad flies to New York for last UN visit**

TEHRAN, Sept. 22 (MNA) – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran left for New York on Saturday to attend the annual United Nations General Assembly meeting.

It is President Ahmadinejad's final visit to the UN General Assembly as his second term in office is coming to an end.

Ahmadinejad is scheduled to hold a series of meetings with a number of officials attending the UN conference.

According to the Tehran Times, Ahmadinejad had said on Wednesday that he would focus on the importance of the Non-Aligned Movement during his speech at the assembly's session.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1702516>

- **President Ahmadinejad meets with UN chief in New York**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad (L) shakes hands with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon before their meeting at UN headquarters in New York on September 23, 2012.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad (L) shakes hands with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon before their meeting at UN headquarters in New York on September 23, 2012.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.



The president also presented a tapestry with the Iranian map to the UN chief before the meeting on Sunday.

A member of the Iranian delegation said the tapestry is "a token of peace and affection" from the Iranian people.

During the meeting, Ahmadinejad called for closer cooperation between the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the United Nations, saying effective measures should be taken to establish sustainable peace throughout the world.

Iran assumed the rotating presidency of NAM for three years during the 16th NAM Summit held in Tehran in late August.

The two also discussed on ways to end the ongoing crisis in Syria, and urged a peaceful political solution to the country's unrest.

Ahmadinejad arrived in New York on earlier in the day to participate in the 67th session of the UN General Assembly.

Ahmadinejad is scheduled to address the session on Wednesday and elaborate on the Islamic Republic's stance on key international issues.

On the sidelines of the session, he will also hold talks with senior officials from the participating countries, other UN figures, heads of regional and global organizations, American university professors and students, religious leaders and Iranian nationals in the US.

This is Ahmadinejad's eighth trip to New York for a UN General Assembly session since first becoming president back in 2005.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/24/263254/iran-president-meets-with-un-chief/>

- **Ahmadinejad UN visit very important: Official**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (L) and Iranian First Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi at Tehran's

Mehrabad Airport before the president's departure to New York for the UN meeting on September 22, 2012.

Mr. President has left for the UN with full hands and will definitely pose questions that have many eager listeners in the international community."

Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Seyyed Solat Mortazavi says the presence of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the 67th United Nations General Assembly is very important in the current situation.

"Mr. President has left for the UN with full hands and will definitely pose questions that have many eager listeners in the international community," Mortazavi told IRNA on Sunday.

The Iranian official went on to say that Ahmadinejad attends the meeting not only as Iran's president, but also as the president of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Mortazavi stated that today's world is about to see a major economic and political development and as time passes,

people become more aware of the exploitation of the capitalist system.

The Islamic Awakening, on the other hand, has affected the political geography of Islamic countries and brought various challenges upon the global arrogance, he added.

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This is Ahmadinejad's eighth trip to New York for a UN General Assembly session

since first becoming president back in 2005.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/23/263219/ahmadinejad-un-visit-very-important/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Palestinian state efforts at risk in cash crisis**

Efforts to create a Palestinian state could collapse unless emergency funds are found to bail out its nascent government, the Palestinian finance minister Sunday.

The Palestinian Authority faces a \$400 million shortfall this year and has already been hit by protests over the spiraling cost of living and spending cuts by president Mahmoud Abbas's administration.

"The two state solution is in jeopardy if the PA is not able to continue to function and prepare for the two state solution," Palestinian finance minister Nabil Kassis said after a meeting of donor nations at the UN headquarters.

"This could be very soon," Kassis told reporters calling for urgent action by

donors who have not yet kept finance promises.

Without giving a timeframe for how long the Palestinian Authority can survive without help, he said: "This should come sooner than later, late would be too late."

The minister said there were \$300 million dollars of pledges unpaid. Some of this has been blocked by the US Congress.

An economic crisis gripping the Palestinian territories has exacerbated growing frustration over deadlock in the peace process. There have been no talks between the two sides for two years, with Palestinians refusing to negotiate while Israel continues with its settlement of the occupied territories.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have estimated a \$400 million cash shortage which could get worse by the end of the year.

The World Bank has predicted the Palestinian Authority may be forced to extend arrears already owed in pensions and cut basic spending such as wages "which could have severe social impacts."

Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said that the crisis was caused by Israel's restrictions on the economy in the West Bank as well slower growth and smaller donor payments.

Israel has paid more than \$110 million in advanced fees on VAT returns in the past two months, an Israeli official said. Israel is "very concerned" about the crisis, said Irit Ben-Abba of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

But the Norwegian minister said Israel should ease restrictions on access to water, land, raw materials and export markets. The Palestinian economic crisis is "dire and getting worse," he said.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Palestinians to lift Israel import restrictions, minister says**

The Palestinian West Bank government on Sunday said it was ending restrictions limiting the number of traders who can import Israeli goods into the territory, in a bid to reduce spiraling prices.

"The system of exclusive agencies and exclusive distributors for goods and products manufactured in Israel or foreign goods imported through an Israeli agent is cancelled," economy minister Jawad Naji told a news conference.

"We will allow all interested traders to buy directly from the Israeli market without an intermediary, in compliance with the laws and mechanisms of the Palestinian Authority," he said in Ramallah.

The decision does not include the import of goods made on Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Naji said, warning that traders who deal in settlement products would face sanctions.

The move, which could push down the prices of a wide range of products imported from or through Israel and sold in the West Bank, comes as the Palestinian Authority government struggles with public anger of the cost of living.

Naji also said the government would institute set prices for eight essential items—milk, eggs, meat, chicken, vegetable oil, sugar, rice and bread.

He warned that the government would monitor sales of the goods and punish those selling outside the set price limits.

In recent weeks, Palestinian transportation workers and government employees have staged strikes that at times paralyzed West Bank cities, angry at rising costs, particularly of fuel.

In response, prime minister Salam Fayyad announced he would slash VAT and roll back fuel price increases. He has also opened a dialogue with several top unions.

But even as the dialogue continues, the transportation union said Sunday it planned two new protest actions—a two-hour strike on Monday afternoon and a day-long strike on Wednesday.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Two Palestinian prisoners end hunger strikes**

Two Palestinian long-term hunger strikers have ended weeks-long fasts after deals expected to secure their release, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said on Sunday.

"Hassan Safadi and Samer Barq have suspended their hunger strikes," Amani Sarahna, a spokesperson for the Club, told AFP.

"Safadi will be released on October 29, at the end of his detention period. Barq will be held until the Israelis and Egyptian reach an agreement [on his transfer]. If they don't reach a deal, he will resume his hunger strike."

Israeli prison spokesperson Sivan Weizman confirmed the two had ended their hunger strike, and said they were still under medical supervision, describing their medical condition as "adequate."

Amnesty International said last month that Safadi and Barq had refused food since May 22 and June 21 respectively to protest their administrative detention.

Administrative detention orders are issued without trial or conviction by a military court, and can be renewed indefinitely for periods of six months.

Barq was transferred to intensive care earlier this month, and the International

Committee of the Red Cross issued a statement warned that he, Safadi and a third fasting prisoner, Ayman Sharawneh, were close to death.

More than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners, including Safadi, in May ended a mass hunger strike for better conditions in a deal with prison authorities.

One of the terms of the accord was that those held without trial in administrative detention would go free at the end of their current terms, unless fresh evidence emerged against them.

Safadi went back on hunger strike after his detention order was renewed.

Egypt has reportedly offered to host Barq, who holds Pakistani citizenship, under a deal with Israel that would see the prisoner ultimately transferred to Pakistan. But the deal has not yet been finalized.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **PA, Israel discuss developing gas off Gaza coast**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- The Palestinian Authority is negotiating with Israel for permission to develop natural gas off the coast of the Gaza Strip, Israeli and foreign diplomats said on Sunday.

Mediterranean gas could be a windfall for the PA, which operates under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and has alarmed the World Bank by sinking into fiscal crises amid shortfalls in international aid.

As envisaged in the exploratory gas talks initiated by peace envoy Tony Blair, the PA would alone levy tariffs on any eventual revenues from private pumping in Gazan waters, though breakaway Hamas Islamists govern the coastal enclave.

Israel, which keeps Gaza under a close maritime blockade, said it had held "initial negotiations" with the PA, and at its behest, about the Palestinian gas.

"Development of the Gaza Marine gas field will generate revenues that could contribute dramatically to Palestinian fiscal sustainability," the Israeli Foreign Ministry said in a report, published on

Sunday, to world powers coordinating economic aid for the Palestinians.

PA officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

Blair's spokeswoman Ruti Winterstein said he secured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's approval in February for the negotiations and they had taken place over recent weeks.

"The (gas) field itself will take around three or four years to develop," she said, adding talks were at a preliminary stage.

Two private partners, Consolidated Contractors Company and BG Group, would develop the gas field "and hand over the royalties and the taxes to the PA under the supervision of Prime Minister Fayyad," Winterstein said.

Crying foul

Hamas, which won a Palestinian election in 2006 and sat in an uncomfortable alliance with President Mahmoud Abbas's secular Fatah faction until they fought a civil war a year later, cried foul at the gas plans.

"We do not recognize any agreement reached by the Palestinian Authority regarding the gas fields off Gaza's shores, and the government in Gaza should be consulted over any agreement of this kind," said Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri.

Blair, a former British prime minister, represents the so-called Quartet of Middle East peace brokers - the United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations.

Israel has been vigorously developing its own Mediterranean gas fields in a hope for energy independence partly spurred by political instability and pipeline sabotage in neighboring Egypt, which once supplied 40 percent of its gas.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=522659>

- **Hamas official: Mashaal will step down as party chief**

Mashaal, is tired of policy challenges from the Islamist group's Gazabased leadership and is not seeking re-election in a vote now underway

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Hamas' leader in exile, Khaled Mashaal, is not seeking re-election, a Hamas official said Sunday.

Senior Hamas official Salah Bardawil told Ma'an that Mashaal will remain in the Islamist movement but has decided not to run for re-election as party chief.



"When Mashaal said he was not seeking re-election, a message was sent to him from the movement's leaders unanimously asking him to change his mind," Bardawil said.

Serious discussions are ongoing within Hamas about a successor to Mashaal, Ma'an learned from sources close to the movement.

The only potential candidates would be current prime minister Ismail Haniyeh or

deputy head of Hamas politburo Mousa Abu Marzouq, based in Cairo. The sources said that Abu Marzouq is likely to be the preferred choice.

Over the past five months, Hamas, which has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007, has been quietly holding a leadership ballot among activists in the territory, the occupied West Bank, Israeli prisons and in Arab and other foreign countries.

Mashaal, who has led Hamas since 1996 from various Arab capitals, told a meeting of its senior officials in Cairo last week that he had no desire to remain its chief and his decision not to run in the election was final, said a source close to Hamas.

Earlier this year, Mashaal angered Hamas's Gaza-based leadership by agreeing that its main rival, the Fatah movement of Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, could lead any future unity government.

Mashaal has also voiced what critics in Hamas saw as approval for Abbas's now-stalled talks with Israel, saying in 2011 that 20 years after a 1991 international

Middle East conference, Palestinians were willing to give peace another chance.

"Mashaal has grown impatient with some of his Gaza officials who recently tried to undermine decisions he took on behalf of the group," said a diplomatic source in the region.

The politburo chief is more savvy about world politics and more pragmatic than Hamas leaders who have lived only in the Gaza Strip, the source said.

Hamas has repeatedly denied any internal rift.

The diplomatic source said Mashaal was likely to come under pressure from within Hamas and from some Arab countries to agree to stand as a candidate before a final vote, whose date remains secret.

The location of a new Hamas chief could be key to winning votes. Hamas activists have traditionally preferred leaders in exile, in venues seen as offering better personal security than in the Gaza Strip which Israeli drones overfly frequently.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=522725>

- **Water Authority Report to Ad Hoc Committee Highlights Water Problems**

RAMALLAH, September 23, 2012 (Wafa) – The Water Authority report, published Sunday, highlighted the severe water shortages and acute water quality problems which continue to negatively affect the lives and livelihoods of millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

PWA report, titled 'Palestinian Water Sector: Status Summary Report, Sept. 2012,' will be distributed to members of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting in New York on Sunday.

It stated that these problems are not caused by environmental factors, but attributable to the discriminatory water policies and practices Israel has instituted across the occupied Palestinian Territory over the last forty five years.

"While customary international water law calls for all such trans-boundary freshwater resources to be shared

“equitably and reasonably,” Israel currently exploits over 90 per cent of these resources for exclusive Israeli use, including for use in Israeli settlements, and allocates less than 10 per cent for Palestinian use,” It said.

The report covered main topics such as: water shortages in the West Bank, poor water quality in Gaza, Using the Joint Water Committee to consolidate illegal Israeli settlements, ICA Permits: prohibiting Palestinian development of Area C, and using water as a weapon: Israeli demolitions of Palestinian wells and cisterns.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20724>

- **Pollards dismiss media rumors of upcoming release**

Report that Obama is set to pardon Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard is "an idle rumor," says wife Esther Pollard.

Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard’s wife, Esther, called a report that her husband would be released by US President Barack Obama following the November 6 US election Sunday “an idle rumor.”

A report in Yediot Aharonot cited a “high-level Israeli official” saying that Obama intended to commute Pollard’s life sentence as part of the list of pardons and clemencies he will grant between the election and when his term ends in January.

“I will be very surprised if Pollard will not go free at the end of his term,” the official said.

The official cited the conversation between President Shimon Peres and Obama in Washington in June as the reason for his optimism. The contents of the conversation have been kept a secret.

A spokesperson for the campaign for Pollard’s release said there had been many false reports over the years about his imminent release. For instance, in April 2005, Yediot Aharonot reported on its front page that then-US president George W.

Bush would release him to help then-prime minister Ariel Sharon sell his withdrawal from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli public.

“This is not the first time such cynical news stories have spun rumors which detract attention and concern for my husband’s plight,” Esther Pollard said. “We have been through this numerous times before. The headlines always promise Jonathan’s release at some future date which never arrives, while at the same time alleviating the pressure for Jonathan’s release in the present tense.”

Asked whether she had any doubts that perhaps this time the rumor might be true, Pollard, replied, “It is time to press for Jonathan’s release now, and not rely on baseless rumors for some future uncertain date.”

Political officials speculated that the report might have been leaked in order to influence the Jewish vote in the American election or to send a message to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that Obama had leverage over him in Pollard.

“We have to be optimistic and do what we can even if the article is connected to the election and the possibility of a meeting between Netanyahu and Obama,” said MK

Ronit Tirosh (Kadima), who heads the Knesset’s Pollard lobby.

“We should do what we can to reach the people who have influence on Obama if we hope to succeed to bring him home.”

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=286038>

- **PM in budget talks aimed at avoiding early election**

Contrary to reports, Netanyahu undecided on when to hold race; FM: I'm not among those who think next election is unavoidable.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu formed a team to handle negotiations on the 2013 state budget Sunday in an effort to determine whether he can avoid the early election that would have to be held if the budget does not pass on time.

Netanyahu sent the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Harel Locker, and coalition chairman Ze'ev Elkin to Yisrael Beytenu and Shas to attempt to draft a majority for the budget, which legally must pass in the cabinet and be

submitted to the Knesset by the end of October.

Based on the results of the talks, Netanyahu will make a decision during the Succot holiday on whether to advance the election to January or February or pass the budget and hold the race on time in October 2013.

Sources close to the prime minister strongly denied contradictory reports in the anti-Netanyahu newspaper Yediot Aharonot that he had already decided to go to elections and in the pro-Netanyahu Israel Hayom newspaper that he expected to pass the budget and avoid an election.

“Everyone can speculate however they choose, but it won't change the fact that the prime minister has not yet made a decision,” said a source close to Netanyahu who has discussed the question of early elections with him.

Netanyahu has received advice on both sides from Likud ministers and his closest advisers. His decision is expected to be impacted by his talks on preventing the nuclearization of Iran in New York just as

much as the deliberations with Yisrael Beytenu and Shas in Jerusalem.

Both parties have reported to Netanyahu's representatives that they do not want early elections to be held but that they have red lines. Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman told Israel Radio that holding an election would not impact the economy, which depends on exports to markets in Europe and the US that are not doing as well financially.

“I am not among those who think the next election is unavoidable,” Liberman said. “The attempt to pass the budget should not be avoided. It's not easy or comfortable to pass a budget in an election year, but responsibility requires it.”

Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich complained that in a normal year, the budget is drafted by September, but now government ministries do not know how to make plans for the future.

“Everyone is walking like blind people in the dark and I can't even begin to describe the economic damage this causes,” Yacimovich said.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=286003>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **US official: No proof Libya attack tied to film**

The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee told CNN on Sunday that there is no proof that the attack on the US consulate in Libya earlier in the month was connected to protests over anti-Islam movie Innocence of Muslims.

"I have seen no information that shows that there was a protest going on as you have seen around any other embassy at the time. It was clearly designed to be an attack," Rep. Mike Rogers told CNN.

"It was clear it had to be a pre-planned event," he said, adding that al-Qaida or an al-Qaida affiliated group was probably behind the attack.

Rogers's comments followed skepticism by American media in recent days over US President Barack Obama's official version of the assault on the US consulate in Benghazi, in which four Americans,

including ambassador Christopher Stevens were killed.

CBS News cited witnesses as saying that "there was never an anti-American protest outside the [US] consulate [in Benghazi]," and that the mission "came under planned attack."

The report concluded that the new testimony "is in direct contradiction to the [Obama] administration's account of the incident" and therefore, "what's clear is that the public won't get a detailed account of what happened until after the election."

The CBS report followed other revelations Thursday that in the months leading up to his death Stephens expressed concerns that his safety was at risk, specifically pointing to the fact that his name was on an al-Qaida hit list.

According to CNN, citing a source close to the ambassador, prior to his death Stevens repeatedly mentioned the rise in Islamic extremism and al-Qaida's growing presence in Libya.

FOX News, citing US intelligence sources, claimed that al-Qaida was directly involved in the attack, alleging that former Guantanamo Bay inmate Sufyan Ben Qumu may have led the assault.

On Wednesday, in testimony given to the US Senate Homeland Security Committee, Director of the US National Counterterrorism Center Matthew Olsen described the assault on the consulate as a "terrorist attack."

On Thursday, the White House reinforced Olsen's statements, saying it was "self-evident" that what happened in Benghazi was a "terrorist attack." However, no clarification as to whether the administration believed the attack was preplanned was forthcoming.

To date, the White House has maintained that the attack was spontaneous, resulting from the hijacking by extremists of a demonstration over the "Innocence of Muslims" film denigrating the Prophet Muhammad.

As recently as Wednesday, press secretary Jay Carney said "based on what we know now and knew at the time, we have no

evidence of a preplanned or premeditated attack." On Sunday, US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice told CBS' "Face the Nation" that the US "do[es] not have information at present that leads us to conclude that this was premeditated."

Though the FBI has yet to arrive at the scene of the Benghazi consulate, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is scheduled to give a classified account of what happened to a congressional committee.

Earlier this week, Libyan President Mohammed el-Megarif said the attack "was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago, and they were planning this criminal act since their arrival."

<http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=286018>

- **Attack on US mission in Libya big intelligence loss, report says**

The attack that killed the US ambassador to Libya dealt a huge blow to US intelligence operations because CIA agents and contractors were among the

Americans evacuated afterward, The New York Times reported late Sunday.

The CIA's intelligence targets in unstable Libya included an Islamist militia that some have blamed for the September 11 attack in the eastern city of Benghazi and suspected members of AL-Qaeda's North African affiliate, the paper said.

More than two dozen Americans were rushed out of Libya after the attack that killed ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. They included about a dozen CIA operatives and contractors monitoring a variety of armed groups in the city, the paper reported.

"It is a catastrophic intelligence loss," it quoted an American official who has served in Libya as saying. "We got our eyes poked out."

However, the paper quoted another official as saying the United States was still collecting information via other techniques such as informants, intercepting mobile phone conversations and use of satellite images.

"The United States isn't close to being blind in Benghazi and eastern Libya," the second official said.

The paper also said that contrary to initial accounts, a consulate annex that was also attacked was never meant to be a "safe house" for the CIA.

Last week Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced an official review of security at the US mission in Libya.

President Barack Obama's administration initially said it believed extremists had not really planned the attack in Libya but simply taken advantage of a spontaneous protest over an anti-Islamic trailer to mix in and attack.

The White House for the first time Thursday described the assault as a "terrorist attack" and said it could have links to Al-Qaeda.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Doubt cast on protest during Libya envoy attack**

An influential US lawmaker cast doubt Sunday over whether there was even an anti-American protest going on when the American ambassador to Libya was killed earlier this month.

Envoy Chris Stevens and three other Americans died at the consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi on September 11, hours after demonstrations over an anti-Islamic movie trailer erupted at the US embassy in Cairo, Egypt.

President Barack Obama's administration initially said it believed extremists had not really planned the attack in Libya but simply taken advantage of a spontaneous protest over the anti-Islamic trailer.

The White House for the first time Thursday described the assault as a "terrorist attack" and said it could have links to Al-Qaeda, but a Republican lawmaker cast doubt Sunday over whether the protests even happened.

"I have seen no information that shows that there was a protest going on as you have seen around any other embassy at the time," Mike Rogers, chairman of the

House intelligence committee, told CNN's "State of the Union" program.

"The notion about the film... I think the administration was ill-advised to push down that road," he added.

Rogers said he believed it was a revenge attack timed to coincide with the 11th anniversary of 9/11 but that it wasn't clear if the militants had known Stevens was there or just got lucky.

"This had to be a pre-planned event. We know it was an act of terrorism. I think the administration has come to the conclusion it's an act of terrorism now," he said.

The State Department is under rising scrutiny about what appears to be inadequate security for Stevens and the consulate in Benghazi before the attack.

To answer some of the questions, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced on Thursday an official review of security at the Benghazi mission to be chaired by veteran diplomat Thomas Pickering.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Egyptian court says ex-regime figures can run in polls**

Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court on Sunday ruled that members of ousted president Hosni Mubarak's dissolved party can stand in future parliamentary elections.

The court found that any Egyptian citizen should not be deprived of political rights, "including the right to run in legislative bodies," as long as that person meets the candidacy requirements, judicial sources said.

The ruling allows members of Mubarak's former ruling and now disbanded National Democratic Party to be candidates in future parliamentary elections.

In April 2011, just weeks after protests forced Mubarak to resign after three decades in power, the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the NDP and ordered its funds and property handed over to the government.

The same court on Saturday upheld a June ruling dissolving the Islamist-dominated lower house of parliament.

The People's Assembly was elected late last year, with Islamists winning an overwhelming majority. But on June 14 the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled it invalid, saying there were irregularities in the electoral law.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which ruled after Mubarak was ousted, then dissolved the house. The army was given legislative control, provoking outrage among those wishing to see the military cede power.

On July 8, President Mohamed Morsi, who had risen through the Muslim Brotherhood's ranks, issued a decree ordering the reinstatement of parliament, which the SCC froze two days later.

In August Morsi ordered the surprise retirement of his powerful defense minister and scrapped a constitutional document which handed sweeping powers to the military, in a move some said was aimed at ending the SCAF's power.

Fresh legislative elections are to take place two months after the adoption of a new constitution, which is being drafted by a committee dominated by Islamists and due to be finalized by the end of the year.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?!D=125478>

- **Egypt Islamists slam parliament's death knell, liberals celebrate**

Islamist groups blast Saturday's court decision affirming dissolution of Islamist-led People's Assembly; liberal figures welcome controversial ruling

The fate of the People's Assembly – the lower house of Egypt's parliament – appeared to have been laid to rest on Saturday when the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) ruled in favour of an earlier decision by the High Constitutional Court (HCC) to dissolve the Islamist-led assembly. While a majority of Islamist figures have vowed to contest the decision, liberal and leftist forces hailed the move.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), for its part, which had

held almost half the seats in the assembly, slammed the verdict.

"The atmosphere in which the verdict was issued raises questions," read a statement issued by the FJP's legal committee only hours after Saturday's verdict. "The court had earlier decided to adjourn the case while a ruling came later in another case."

The party here was alluding to the fact that on Saturday a similar case challenging the assembly's dissolution was adjourned by the SAC until mid-October. However, only hours later, the court ruled in favour of the earlier HCC verdict, confirming the assembly's dissolution.

The FJP went on to call for "transparency from the court instead of conflicting positions," adding that the party planned to take additional legal action in response to the controversial ruling.

FJP lawyer Mohamed Abu-Baraka described Saturday's ruling as "a disaster in the history of the Egyptian judiciary."

Couching his reasoning in legal terms, Abu-Baraka stated that the HCC ruling was "legally flawed," given that Egypt's March

2011 Constitutional Declaration – approved via national referendum – protected the country's freely-elected parliament from dissolution.

The "people's choice," Abou-Baraka asserted, should transcend "any other entity's ability to dissolve the assembly."

He went on to state that neither the courts, the presidency, nor the military could legally enforce such a decision. "The HCC ruling has to a large extent contributed to tarnishing Egypt's democratic transition," he asserted.

Not all Islamist figures, however, took issue with the ruling. Hossam Eddin Mostafa, media spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's expansive Wadi El-Gedid governorate, stated that the group would respect the verdict.

"This [ruling] will allow us to prepare for upcoming parliamentary elections, whenever they will be held," he said.

Liberal and leftist forces, meanwhile, which had held less than 30 per cent of the seats in the now-dissolved assembly, welcomed the verdict.

Amr Moussa, former liberal presidential candidate, stated that court rulings must be respected.

"Respect for the rule of law is a main principle that must be upheld to ensure stability in the political arena and respect for the state and people," Moussa asserted.

As head of the newly established Egyptian Conference Party, Moussa stressed the importance of uniting the country's secular forces so as to capture a larger share of parliamentary seats in upcoming polls.

Reform campaigner and founder of the new Constitution Party, Mohamed ElBaradei, also praised Saturday's court ruling.

"The verdict that confirmed the dissolution of parliament is a first step for those in power to understand that legislation is the main pillar for building the county," ElBaradei declared. "A balanced Constituent Assembly [tasked with drafting the new constitution] is the second step of that process."

Dissolution of the People's Assembly has been the subject of considerable controversy since the HCC's initial 14 June ruling to this effect. The Muslim Brotherhood, together with other Islamist parties and groups, had vociferously opposed the verdict, with a number of Islamist lawyers appealing the decision.

Upon his inauguration in late June, President Mohamed Morsi, who hails from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, had attempted to unilaterally restore parliament's lower house. A presidential decree to this effect, however, was quickly overturned by Egypt's then-ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

Other controversial cases still awaiting a final court decision include a case against the constitutionality of the Shura Council (parliament's upper, consultative house) and a similar case against the Constituent Assembly (tasked with drafting a new constitution), members of which were chosen by the now-dissolved People's Assembly.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/53609/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-Islamists-slam-parliaments-death-knell,-libe.aspx>

- **Egypt's AUC suspends classes amid ongoing students' strike**

Closure of campus gates by students protesting tuition fee hikes prompts university administrators to suspend classes, hire private security guards

The administration of the American University in Cairo (AUC) announced the suspension of all classes on Sunday, until further notice, due to an ongoing strike by students protesting recent tuition fee hikes, who have expressed their opposition to the fee increases by sealing the university campus gates.

"After exhausting all alternatives with the students insisting on closing the gates, the American University in Cairo is suspending operations, including all classes, because of the danger posed by the continuing closure of the campus," read an e-mail sent out on Sunday by university administrators.

Ahmed Ezzat, a final-year student at AUC, told Ahram Online that he had found the e-mail from university administrators "very provocative."

"They began their e-mail by claiming that they had 'tried all alternatives.' What does that mean?" Ezzat asked. "Their 'alternatives' were bulldozers and thugs. If these are their alternatives, then I don't consider them an administration."

On Sunday, as the students' strike – which first began last Wednesday – continued, eyewitnesses reported that a bulldozer had been sent to knock down a barbed-wire fence to allow students to access the campus.

The university has also reportedly hired private bodyguards to assist university security after campus gates were removed by student protesters. Ezzat told Ahram Online that one of these bodyguards had threatened a member of the AUC Parents Association.

"Whoever brought in thugs and jeopardized university security should be dismissed," Ezzat asserted.

He went on to say that ongoing negotiations with the university administration had so far led nowhere.

"At a Saturday meeting, Fouad El-Sayes, AUC vice-president for financial affairs, bluntly told us that, whatever we do, the 7 per cent tuition fee hike was here to stay," Ezzat said.

Shortly before the outset of the current academic year, AUC announced a 7 per cent increase in university tuition fees.

An emergency meeting has been scheduled for Monday in hopes of resolving the issue. The meeting is expected to include members of the AUC Parents Association, the university's board of trustees, the Student Union and the administration.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/53615/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-AUC-suspends-classes-amid-ongoing-students-.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Marouni comments on Aoun's alleged assassination attempt**

Kataeb bloc MP Elie Marouni on Monday commented on Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun's claim that he was the target of an assassination attempt in the southern city of Sidon.

"The office of General Aoun first said that Aoun's convoy was targeted by gunfire, denied the news later, and then confirmed it again," Marouni told Free Lebanon radio.

"I do not understand how someone who was [the target of an] assassination [attempt in Sidon could] continue his trip [all the way] to [the northern city of] Batroun," Marouni added.

On Saturday evening, Aoun said he was targeted by an assassination attempt after local media reported his convoy came under fire in Sidon while returning from a tour in Jezzine.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Fatfat: Nicolas' accusations against Future Movement 'shameful'**

Future bloc MP Ahmad Fatfat said on Monday that Change and Reform bloc MP

Nabil Nicolas' statement that the Future Movement was behind the shooting of Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun's convoy in Sidon was "shameful."

"The statements of Nabil Nicolas are not worth responding to because they aim to cause strife and incite [people]," Fatfat also told the Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio.

Nicolas accused the Future Movement on Sunday of attempting to assassinate Aoun.

On Saturday evening, Aoun said he was targeted by an assassination attempt after local media reported his convoy came under fire in the southern city of Sidon while returning from a tour in Jezzine.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Nicolas accuses Future Movement of attempting to assassinate Aoun**

Change and Reform bloc MP Nabil Nicolas accused the Future Movement of attempting to assassinate Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun.

"We accuse the Future Movement of being behind [the shooting on Aoun's convoy] because [its] media tried to cover up the attempt, which shows that it is involved in it," Nicolas told New TV.

He also said that "whoever doubts that there was an assassination attempt against Aoun's convoy should be accused and investigated."

On Saturday evening, Aoun said he was targeted by an assassination attempt after local media reported his convoy came under fire in the southern city of Sidon while returning from a tour in Jezzine.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

6. SYRIA

- **Rebel command moves to Syria in sign of confidence**

The rebel Free Syrian Army's decision to move its command center from Turkey to "liberated areas" inside Syria shows its growing confidence despite the risk of air strikes, analysts said on Sunday.

The FSA announced on Saturday that their command center has been transferred from neighboring Turkey, in a symbolic move for an opposition criticized for being based outside the country.

"The Free Syrian Army command has moved into liberated areas of Syria following arrangements made with battalions and brigades to secure these zones," FSA chief Colonel Riyadh al-Asaad announced in a YouTube video.

Analysts said the move shows the gains on the ground which rebels have made.

"The transfer of the central command is indicative that the FSA has made a great deal of progress and success," said Riad Kahwaji, founder of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA).

From a practical standpoint, he said, the move would improve logistics and facilitate communication.

"Whenever you're able to move your command closer to the front lines it makes your operations more efficient. And it's good for morale," he added.

Syria's vast territory is falling increasingly outside the control of government forces, whose monopoly of the skies is the last strength keeping the Damascus regime afloat, a rebel chief told AFP.

Colonel Ahmed Abdel Wahab, who claims to command a brigade of 850 men in the FSA, said that soldiers in most regions, apart from Damascus, are "prisoners of their barracks" while rebels move freely so long as they stay off main highways.

Relocating the rebel command shows that the rebels "have liberated a zone," said Fabrice Balanche, a Syria specialist who heads the French research center GREMMO. "To install the command in Syria is very symbolic."

But he said the rebels had not gained much in practical terms: "The central command was in Turkey, which was not very far" across the border.

The expert also raised the possibility that the Ankara government, facing criticism from Turkish domestic opposition toward its Syria policies, may have pushed the rebels to leave.

The move, Balanche said, creates a new security problem for the rebels. "They are now at the mercy of aerial attacks."

But with increasingly large swathes of the border area under rebel control, the rebel chiefs have apparently decided to take on such a risk with the goal of unifying ranks.

"It has a strong effect on morale and negates talk that the opposition is in exile when its military wing is at home," Kahwaji said.

The announcement came as the FSA is undermined by internal rivalries, particularly between the central command, set up in Turkey more than a year ago and led by Asaad, and the internal command led by Colonel Qassem Saadeddine.

Another major problem has been the proliferation of splinter groups, with some claiming autonomy of action.

Kahwaji argued that a Syria-based command would help reign in such groups. "They will eventually find themselves better off ... This war can't be

won unless everyone is acting collectively and they are organized," he said.

But Balanche said it would take time for rebel fighters in far-flung regions to fall in line with FSA orders: "I don't see it changing rapidly."

"If the command of the FSA can give them arms and money, this is how they will unify their ranks. But if they have nothing to offer, they won't defer to the command of the FSA," he said.

The rebels are also hoping to win the support of the international community which has so far been reluctant to arm the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad.

"It is the international community that pressured the FSA to reign in its ranks, as they're concerned about the rise of Islamists and jihadists in the rebellion," a Syria expert told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Since late July, the opposition has seized control of at least three key crossings with Turkey, while nearly 80 percent of towns along the Turkish border are outside regime control, according to a watchdog.

"If we had anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, we could quickly gain the advantage," rebel commander Abdel Wahab said. "But if foreign countries don't give us these, we will still win. It will take longer, that's all."

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Air strikes target Syria rebel-held towns, activists say**

Syrian aircraft carried out strikes on rebel bastions across the country on Sunday, especially in central Homs province and Deir Ezzor in the east, a watchdog said, as 31 people were killed nationwide.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said apartment blocks in Albu Kamal were targeted as rebels and soldiers battled on the ground in several districts of the town on the Iraqi border.

"The insurgents are trying to wrest control of this strategic town" in the oil-rich province of Deir Ezzor as well as the nearby Hamdan military airport, said the group's head, Rami Abdel Rahman.

He said losing Albu Kamal would be "a deadly blow for the regime."

In Homs, the country's third largest city, government artillery and air raids targeted the outskirts of the Jubar, Sultaniya and Baba Amr districts where rebels hold positions, said the Observatory.

It added that three fighters were killed in clashes with the army in the village of Nakira just outside Jubar, while one civilian was shot dead by pro-regime gunmen elsewhere in the province.

The Britain-based group, which gathers information from a network of activists on the ground, said warplanes also raided Jebel al-Akrad in the coastal province of Latakia.

Several buildings collapsed under air strikes in the northwestern province of Idlib, Hama in central Syria and Daraa to the south, where one young girl was killed in shelling, according to the Observatory.

In the northern province of Aleppo, rebels destroyed two fighter planes on the ground in Orm, rebel Colonel Ahmad Abdul Wahab told AFP.

And in Aleppo city, where the revolt has centered for the past two months, a woman and a rebel were killed while fierce fighting broke out between rebels and troops in the northern Bustan al-Basha district, the watchdog said.

Residents have largely left embattled Bustan al-Basha, which has faced electricity and water shortages for the past week, witnesses told AFP.

Abu Mahmud, a pastry maker in his forties, said he is the only person left on his "deserted street."

"I sent my family to stay with a relative in a remote neighborhood. But if I leave the rebels will move in," he said. "This house is everything I have."

In Damascus, two explosions were heard in the central Shaghur area. Ambulances were seen but there was no word on the nature of the blasts, the Observatory said.

To the west of the capital, the suburb of Maadameya al-Sham came under heavy shelling by regime forces, destroying several houses, it said.

The Local Coordination Committees, a network of activists on the ground, said the shelling was coming from the Mazzeh military airport, one of the largest in the country.

The LCC said the elite Fourth Division of the army was using mortars and artillery to target residential areas.

The army also shelled the restive suburb of Douma northeast of Damascus, killing two civilians, the watchdog said.

It gave an initial toll of 31 killed—11 civilians, 12 soldiers and eight rebels—nationwide on Sunday.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Free Syrian Army: Fall of regime is question of months**

Rebel FSA says it now controls most of Syria, one day after announcing that it has moved its command centre from Turkey to 'liberated areas' inside country.

ATMA (Syria) - The rebel Free Syrian Army said on Sunday it now controls most of the

war-torn country, a day after announcing that it has moved its command centre from Turkey to "liberated areas" inside Syria.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon and UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi held talks about Syria on Saturday, agreeing the crisis was "a steadily increasing threat to regional peace and stability," according to a statement.

Brahimi, who was appointed in early September, is due to brief the UN Security Council on Monday about his first round of talks with both the regime, including President Bashar al-Assad, and opposition groups.

The international community's efforts to halt more than 18 months of bloodshed in Syria have so far failed to make any headway, and fighting persisted on the ground overnight and on Sunday morning.

Regime forces shelled many rebel-held areas, including in and around Damascus, second city Aleppo in the north, neighbouring Idlib, the central cities of Hama and Homs, and Daraa in the south, a watchdog said.

In Aleppo, the key battleground for the past two months, a correspondent reported clashes as rebels exchanged fire in Bustan al-Qasr and Bustan al-Zahraa neighbourhoods.

Government forces shelled the Aleppo districts of Fardus, Sakhur and Suleiman al-Halabi, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based watchdog.

It added that two rebel fighters were killed in Daraa province where the uprising against the Assad regime broke out in March 2011.



The Observatory said that 150 people were killed across Syria on Saturday -- 88 civilians, 30 rebels and 32 soldiers. Another 25 bodies were found in Damascus.

As the fighting continued unabated, a rebel commander said that the regime's aerial superiority was the only thing preventing the Free Syrian Army from taking control of the capital.

"We control most of the country. In most regions, the soldiers are prisoners of their barracks. They go out very little and we can move freely everywhere, except Damascus," said Colonel Ahmed Abdel Wahab.

"With or without outside help, the fall of the regime is a question of months, not years," said Abdel Wahab, who claims that he commands a brigade of 850 men in the FSA.

"If we had anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, we could quickly gain the advantage," he said, speaking in the village of Atma near the Syrian border with Turkey.

"But if foreign countries don't give us these, we will still win. It will take longer, that's all."

Wahab, a colonel in the regular army only nine months ago, said his defection was driven by "the magnitude of the crimes of the regime, which is killing its own people."

He said he commands four katibas (battalions) which make up the "Nasser Salaheddine" brigade in Aleppo and the region.

Wahab said he attends daily meetings with FSA leaders in the northern metropolis, where orders are given to him and other battalion commanders.

On Saturday, the FSA said the next step would be to "liberate" Damascus as it announced that it has moved its command base from Turkey to areas it controls inside Syria.

"The Free Syrian Army command has moved into liberated areas of Syria following arrangements made with battalions and brigades to secure these zones," FSA chief Colonel Riyadh al-Asaad said in a video posted on the Internet.

Nearly 80 percent of towns and villages along the Turkish border are outside the

control of Damascus, according to the Syrian Observatory.

The opposition Syrian National Council has warned that the deadly conflict which broke out in March 2011 was reaching "a point of extreme gravity" that could trigger higher levels of extremism in neighbouring states.

According to the Observatory, at least 29,000 people have been killed since the revolt against Assad's rule erupted. The United Nations puts the toll at more than 20,000.

As the violence raged, a top NATO general said the alliance does not believe military intervention would bring any improvement in Syria's security situation.

Germany's Manfred Lange said the "political process has to be pushed forward, sanctions need to take effect. At the moment, this situation cannot be solved by the military in a responsible way."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54510>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain refers 39 people to court over anti-police attack**

Bahrain have referred 39 people to court after they were accused of allegedly carrying out a twin bomb attack in April that wounded four policemen in a Shiite village, said BNA news agency.

"The public prosecution has finished its extensive investigations in the twin bomb attack in the village of Diraz that wounded four members of the security forces, two of them seriously," BNA quoted deputy attorney general Ibrahim al-Kawari as saying.

The case has been referred to the criminal court and the trial of 39 defendants involved in the case will begin on October 11, said BNA, adding that 18 of them remain at large.

The 39 are accused of "carrying out terrorist crimes... aimed at undermining security" as well as "endangering the lives of people and public and private property."

They have "plotted to kill several policemen" and "set off two bombs to cause terror" among people, said BNA. They are also charged with "obtaining petrol bombs to endanger the lives of policemen."

In April, BNA cited a senior police official as saying that a bomb attack carried out by "terrorists" wounded four Bahraini policemen in Diraz.

On May 27, a Bahraini court jailed six Shiites for 15 years for plotting attacks in the Gulf kingdom, including an attempt to blow up the causeway with Saudi Arabia.

Sporadic protests have intensified since a March 2011 crackdown ended month-long protests in central Manama demanding democratic reforms.

According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 80 people have died in Bahrain since the start of the violence on February 14 last year.

Bahrain's interior ministry says more than 700 people, including some police officers, have been wounded by the protests since the beginning of the year.

To read more:

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=439446#ixzz27MuTcur1>

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- **UAE Islamist group denies reports it has an armed wing**

Despite local media reports revealing their establishment of a secret organizations with an armed wing in the Gulf state, UAE Islamists denies such charges

An Islamist group in the United Arab Emirates denied reports that its members had set up an armed wing with the aim of seizing power and establishing an Islamic state in the Gulf Arab country.

Local media in the UAE reported on Thursday that Islamists, who had been detained by the Gulf state's authorities in the last few months, confessed to setting up a secret organisation with an armed wing.

"These accusations are not true and are baseless, except in the minds of those who fabricated them," the al-Islah group said in a statement sent to Reuters on Sunday.

"How is it possible that a group of civilians consisting of university professors, teachers, lawyers and businessmen turn into a military organisation?"

The UAE is holding some 60 members of al-Islah which is suspected of having links with Muslim Brotherhood organisation - banned in the UAE, the privately owned al-Khaleej newspaper reported. Two other newspapers, including state-owned al-Bayan, ran similar reports. None gave named sources.

A UAE official declined to comment on the reports, saying the matter was subject to legal proceedings.

UAE's state prosecutor has charged the detainees with founding an organisation that violates state security, having links to foreign organisations and insulting the political leadership, al-Khaleej reported. Their case will be referred to the relevant court soon, it said.

Al-Islah, which says its mission was to advocate peaceful reforms, said it has no connections with the global Muslim Brotherhood organisation, which was founded in Egypt in 1928. The group has risen to power in Egypt after the uprising that forced Hosni Mubarak to step down last year.

"The (group's) allegiance to the UAE government is based on its belief in the legitimacy of the existing ruling system," al-Islah said in the statement.

Dubai police chief Dhahi Khalfan said in March that Western intelligence agencies told him the Muslim Brotherhood were plotting to create Gulf governments which would pay allegiance to the group.

The UAE, a significant oil exporter and Middle East business hub, tolerates no organised political opposition.

Concerned about possible spillover from the Arab Spring, it has acted fast to isolate dissidents, stripping seven Islamists of their citizenship last year on national security grounds.

The UAE said then that the men, who were naturalised as Emiratis, were originally of non-Emirati origin.

Islamists' demands in the UAE include more civil rights and greater power for the Federal National Council, a quasi-parliamentary body that advises the government - appointed by the UAE's Sunni Muslim rulers - but has no legislative power.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/53611/World/Region/UAE-Islamist-group-denies-reports-it-has-an-armed-.aspx>

- **Saudi Shiites protest against anti-Islam film**

Hundreds of Saudis demonstrated against an anti-Islam film in a Shiite village in the Eastern Province of the kingdom, which bans any protests, witnesses said on Sunday.

Chanting "Oh, messenger of Allah," the protesters marched in Awamiya late Saturday following a call by Shiite cleric Abdulkarim al-Hubail, in line with worldwide demonstrations against the movie titled "Innocence of Muslims".

Demonstrators on Friday in nearby Sihat village of Qatif district burned the Israeli and US flags, also in protest against the film that was produced in the United States. Security forces did not intervene despite a ban on demonstrations.

Since early 2011, Qatif has been scene of sporadic protests and confrontations between police and marginalised Shiites who are estimated to number about two million and concentrated in oil-rich Eastern Province.

Unrest erupted after an outbreak of violence between Shiite pilgrims and religious police in the Muslim holy city of Medina in February 2011.

The protests escalated when the kingdom led a force of Gulf troops into neighbouring Bahrain the following month to help crush a Shiite-led uprising against the Sunni monarchy there. Ten people have been killed in the violence.

Rights groups say more than 600 people from Qatif have been arrested since spring 2011, but most of them were released.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/53604/World/Region/Saudi-Shiites-protest-against-antislam-film.aspx>

- **Yemen president embarks on first tour to Western powers**

After Britain, Hadi will visit US, where he will meet President Obama, attend 'Friends of Yemen' meeting in New York.

SANAA - Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, elected in February to lead a political transition, on Sunday embarked on his first tour to Western powers, beginning in Britain, the state news agency Saba reported.

Hadi "headed today to Britain, the first stop in a tour that will take him to several European countries as well as the United States," Saba said.

"This tour comes in response to an invitation by these countries which backed the (Gulf-brokered) historic political deal in Yemen" under which former strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh transferred power to Hadi, Saba reported.

After Britain, Hadi will visit the United States, where he will meet President

Barack Obama and attend a "Friends of Yemen" meeting in New York on September 27.

He will discuss with Obama "the special relations between Yemen and America as well as matters of mutual interest," it said.

Hadi will then visit France and Germany.

Yemen is undergoing a difficult political transition after a year-long uprising unseated Saleh and left the economy of the Arabian Peninsula's poorest nation in a shambles.

Global donors earlier this month in the Saudi capital Riyadh made aid pledges of \$6.4 billion to Yemen, the World Bank said, half of what Sanaa says it needs to weather the political transition.

The Friends of Yemen forum was set up at an international conference in London in January 2010 to help Sanaa combat a resurgent Al-Qaeda threat in the ancestral homeland of its slain chief Osama bin Laden and other security challenges.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54520>

- **Salafists-Zaidi clashes re-erupt in northern Yemen: Eight people killed**

Renewed clashes between Shiite Zaidi rebels and Salafists kill up to eight people in northern Yemen.

SANAA - Eight people were killed in renewed clashes between Shiite Zaidi rebels and Salafists in northern Yemen on Saturday, the second straight day of bloodshed, tribal sources.

"Today's clashes killed eight people and wounded several others on both sides," a tribal source said of the fighting since Friday in the town of Reda in Amran province.



An earlier tribal source had put Saturday's death toll at four Salafists, a day after another Salafist was reported killed.

Witnesses said Zaidi rebels shelled a mosque in Reda on Saturday morning and blew up a Koranic school.

Fighting still raged in the afternoon, they said.

The confrontations first broke out as Salafists and tribesmen tried to prevent a Zaidi protest against administrative appointments in their regions.

The two sides, armed with rocket-propelled grenades, brought in reinforcements and the situation was tense in the city, witnesses said.

Residents said tensions escalated after the appointment of supporters of the Islamist party Al-Islah to head Yemen's northern provinces, a move rejected by the Zaidis.

The clashes come ahead of a national dialogue scheduled for later this year as part of a political agreement that led to the February departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh following a year of unrest.

Zaidi rebels have indicated they would take part in the dialogue.

Dozens of people have been killed since last year in sectarian clashes between the rebels and Sunni Salafists trying to tighten their grip on northern Yemen, in the absence of government control.

Zaidis make up a minority in the Sunni-majority country.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54507>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Top Chinese Security Official Makes Surprise Visit To Afghanistan

Zhou Yongkang

September 23, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Chinese state media say the country's top security official has made the first high-level trip to Afghanistan by a senior Chinese leader in nearly 50 years.

Xinhua news agency reported that Zhou Yongkang made the four-hour visit on September 22, during which he met with President Hamid Karzai in Kabul.

Zhou, who is in charge of China's security and justice affairs, was quoted as saying: "It is in line with the fundamental interests of the two peoples for China and Afghanistan to strengthen a strategic and cooperative partnership... conducive to regional peace, stability, and development."

The report said the late President Liu Shaoqi, the last senior Chinese official to visit Afghanistan, visited in 1966.

In Beijing in June, Karzai pledged to work with China to fight terrorism and extremism in the region.

Based on reporting by Xinhua and AFP

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghans nabbed over 'insider attack plan'**

Press TV

September 23, 2012

Two Afghans have been arrested over alleged attempts to carry out insider attacks against the US-led forces in war-ravaged Afghanistan.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a statement on Sunday, "Afghan and coalition security forces confirmed today the arrest of two insider attack planners."

According to the statement, the two were arrested "during a security operation in Pul-e Alam district, Logar Province, Friday."

The statement added that the two planned several operations in the province.

"At the time of their arrest, the attack planners were in the advanced stages of preparing for a strike against a coalition base, which included the construction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), recruitment of insurgent fighters, and the attempted infiltration of Afghan security forces. The security force also detained one suspected insurgent as a result of the operation."

Last week, six US-led soldiers were killed by Afghan police forces in the country.

According to a count by the International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan,

over 50 US-led foreign soldiers have been killed this year in the so-called insider attacks, in which Afghan soldiers turn their weapons against foreign forces.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **US-led airstrikes kill 7 in Afghanistan**

Press TV

September 23, 2012

At least seven people have been killed in US-led airstrikes carried out in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand.

Local sources said a warplane with the US-led NATO coalition forces carried out airstrikes on Trikh Nawar area of Naway-i-Barakzai district on Sunday.

Provincial officials confirmed the attacks and the deaths, but the Western military alliance has not made any comments yet.

Many civilians have lost their lives in the US-led operations in various parts of Afghanistan over the past months, with Afghans becoming increasingly outraged

at the seemingly endless number of the deadly assaults.

The issue of civilian casualties in Afghanistan is highly sensitive and has been a major source of friction between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Washington.

The US claims its airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Airstrike kills Taliban commander in eastern Afghanistan**

ASSADABAD, Afghanistan, Sept. 23 (Xinhua) -- Two people including a Taliban commander were killed as aircraft of NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) raided a Taliban hideout in the eastern Afghan province of Kunar on Sunday, a local official said.

"The air raid took place at 09:00 a.m. local time in Chinar village of Marawara district killing Taliban commander Mullah Bajawar and injuring his deputy namely Hizbullah," police spokesman in the province, Shir Wali told Xinhua.

A civilian was also killed in the raid, the spokesman added.

Taliban militants fighting the government and NATO-led troops have yet to make comment.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Anti-sacrilege Afghans block main highway in Nangarhar Province**

Press TV

September 23, 2012

Afghans have blocked a main highway in Nangarhar Province to protest against an anti-Islam movie produced in the US and a French magazine's recent publication of cartoons insulting Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

On Sunday, thousands of people once again held a demonstration in the province against the blasphemous acts.

They also chanted slogans against Washington.

Hundreds of students, mostly from Kabul University, have canceled classes over the

past few days and poured onto the streets in the capital to express their outrage against the recent anti-Islam moves.

The Muslim world has been boiling with anti-Western sentiments over the movie and the sacrilegious cartoons printed in the French weekly Charlie Hebdo.

Anti-blasphemy demonstrations have been held across the Muslim world and several non-Muslim countries, with protesters in some countries marching on the US embassies and torching US flags.

Protesters call for the punishment of the perpetrators of such insults.

Separately, a nationwide strike over the US-made movie was held in Bangladesh on Sunday.

The \$5-million blasphemous movie was reportedly financed by more than 100 Zionist Jews.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan lawmakers back lodging UN complaint against Pakistan**

KABUL, Sept. 23 (Xinhua) -- Members of Wolesi Jirga or lower house of Afghan parliament have backed the country's foreign minister for lodging complaint with the United Nations Security Council over the alleged cross-border artillery shelling from Pakistan, local media reported Sunday.

Some lawmakers in Saturday's session appreciated Afghan foreign minister Zalmi Rasoul for complaining the alleged Pakistani artillery shelling on the eastern Afghan border areas at the UN Security Council, according to the Daily Outlook newspaper.

Pakistan have been occasionally shelling on the border areas in the eastern Kunar and Nuristan provinces, forcing locals to flee their houses for shelters, a claim rejected by Pakistan.

"The national assembly would support every effort convincing the UNSC into taking stern action against Pakistan," Daily Outlook quoted legislator Naqibullah Fayed as saying.

Another lawmaker Shukria Barakzai also asked the UNSC to come hard on Pakistan

for continuously shelling Afghan border villages and put pressure on Islamabad to stop the incursions.

Zalmi Rasoul said in his speech at the UN Security Council on September 20 that cross-border shelling would damage the relations between Kabul and Islamabad, according to a statement of foreign ministry.

"The cross-border shelling of areas of Kunar province of eastern Afghanistan from across the Durand Line, has led to unprecedented anger and frustration among Afghans from all walks of life. We reiterate our call for an immediate and complete end to these acts, which have taken the lives of dozens of Afghans, mainly civilians, while leaving many more wounded. We remain in close contact with the Government of Pakistan to address this issue, holistically and resolutely," Rasoul said.

"Failure to end such attacks risks jeopardizing Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations, with potential negative consequences for necessary bilateral cooperation for peace, security and economic development in our two

countries and the wider region," he said, adding Afghanistan desires close and fruitful relations with Pakistan, a neighbor with whom we share historical, cultural and traditional ties.

The alleged artillery shelling from Pakistan have claimed scores of lives over the past couple of months, according to provincial governor of Kunar, Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi.

Tamim Nuristani, governor of the neighboring Nuristan province, in an interview with the Daily Mandegar, accused Pakistan of incursion, saying the joint attack of Pakistani army and Taliban militants on Kamdish district, Nuristan province has been repulsed.

The Afghan Interior Ministry in the latest move has ordered police to check the import and distribution of Pakistani newspapers in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nuristan and Nangarhar, according to the Daily Mandegar.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Pakistani Press Banned In Afghanistan Over 'Propaganda'**

September 23, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghanistan has banned all newspapers from Pakistan in a move the Interior Ministry says is aimed to block the Taliban from influencing public opinion through the press.

The Afghan Interior Ministry said Afghan border police have swept shops in the eastern provinces of Nuristan, Kunar, and Nangarhar near the Pakistan border to seize copies of Pakistani papers.

"The Afghan Interior Ministry has banned the entry of some Pakistani papers in the east of Afghanistan," Afghan Interior Ministry deputy spokesman Muhammad Najib Danish said on September 23 in Kabul. "After an inspection and monitoring by the Afghan Interior Ministry, we found that there were some stories against freedom of speech and also there was a story against the Afghan security forces in Pakistani newspapers."

Ordinary Afghans, speaking to Reuters, largely agreed with the ban.

"We appreciate the decision made by the Afghan Interior Ministry regarding the banning of Pakistani newspapers," said Kabul resident Muhammad Naiem. "It is the right decision because the Pakistani papers were publishing propaganda and antigovernment stories."

Newspaper vendor Muhammad Samim also welcomed the ban.

"We are so delighted that the Afghan Interior Ministry banned the entry of Pakistani papers into Afghanistan," he said. "We welcome this decision."

The Afghan ban will likely add to tensions between the neighboring countries.

Ties have been strained by months of crossborder shelling that Afghan officials have blamed on Pakistan's military.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to cope with antigovernment militants operating from hideouts on the Afghan side of the border.

With reporting by Reuters and the BBC

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and Selen Tonkuş. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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